

MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION SHEET

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is an infectious illness caused by Neisseria meningitidis, a bacterium that can live in the nose and throat of otherwise healthy persons. Although less than 15% of the population carry the germ, less than 1% of the total population are susceptible to the bacteria and can develop infection of the blood or the fluid around the brain (meningitis).

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Symptoms of the disease are like the flu and include fever, headache, vomiting, and in some cases a stiff neck. People with this disease are visibly sick and may be confused, excited, or drowsy. In rare cases, the symptoms are followed by lowered blood pressure, shock, delirium, sudden extreme weakness, coma, and death. Because the disease spreads quickly in the body, it is important to see a physician immediately if symptoms suggesting meningococcal disease develop.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

The germ that causes meningococcal disease is spread by direct contact with nose and throat secretions. An infected person can transmit the disease by coughing or sneezing directly in the face of others, kissing a person on the mouth, or by sharing a glass or cup. The germ is not spread by casual contact such as sitting in the same room as an infected person or passing an infected person in a hallway or on a sidewalk.

Is there treatment for meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease requires immediate treatment by a physician. Intravenous penicillin or other antibiotics are used to treat infected persons.

Who is at risk of getting meningococcal disease?

Most people who come into contact with meningococcal disease do not become sick. Only persons who have had direct contact with an infected person are at increased risk for the disease. Direct contact means living in the same household or attending the same childcare center as an infected person or having direct contact with the saliva or secretions from the nose or throat of an infected person.

What needs to be done for persons at risk of getting meningococcal disease?

Persons that have had direct contact with an infected person should consult their private physician and should receive a short course of antibiotic treatment to help prevent the disease from occurring.

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

A vaccine is available to help prevent meningococcal disease caused by certain types of Neisseria meningitidis. It is recommended for persons with certain immune system problems and persons traveling to countries where epidemics are occurring. College students, especially freshmen living in dormitories, may want to receive the vaccine to decrease their chances of getting meningococcal disease.